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MUSEUMS AND THE DESIGN AND INDUSTRIES ASSOCIATION*

BY H. H. PEACH

PERHAPS the greatest lesson we are learning from the present titanic struggle is the vital necessity of cooperation, and the need of abolishing specialization or water-tight compartments, in every sphere of national life. Every department of life, whether governmental or private, has been suffering from this narrowest and worst form of individualism, a vice which has hindered the national spirit from welding into a whole, ready to cope with the huge task confronting us.

Germany's strength has lain in unity and cooperation, and on no side can this be better illustrated than in the organization of the artistic activities, especially manifested through the Werkbund—an organization which probably grew out of the visit to England of an architect named Muthe-sius, who was sent as Technical Attaché to the German Embassy in London to study our arts and crafts movement. The aim of the Werkbund is the ennobling of German industrial work through the cooperation of art, industry and handicraft, by means of education, propaganda, and the adoption of a definite attitude on allied questions.

Things go fast in Germany. After eight years, the Werkbund is able to show a membership of over 2,000, including nearly all the best architects, designers, craftsmen, the leading printers, type-founders, engineers, manufacturers, keepers of museums, and educationalists. This society frankly recognized the part played by the machine, and its leading members set to work to get the best out of it, not using the machine to imitate handicraft or the antique, but with "fitness for use" as aim, they made an intelligent study of materials and processes, and so have worked towards the production of sound goods (*Qualität und Arbeit*) which should give the death-blow to shoddy. They have started a movement which, as illustrated by their large exhibition at

Cologne last year, is likely to have an enormous effect upon the world's markets to the detriment of British trade.

One of their most practical pieces of propaganda is an institution called a "Museum for Art in Commerce and Industry." This is a branch and feeder for the Werkbund. Herr Osthaus, who is well known to many of you, placed part of the Folkwang Museum at Hagen at their disposal, and this is used as a center for collecting fine specimens of modern productions which furnish ideas for quality work. The specimens are selected for their fitness for purpose, and both fine machine and handicraft work are included such as may be used in every-day life as they express it, "German quality work," selected with a view to their technical utility. These collections are lent all over Germany, and also in the surrounding countries, in order to stimulate an appreciation for fine work and develop an interest in national art and craft work of all kinds. During 1911-12 six collections were sent to the United States, and included loans from the Imperial Museum, Vienna and from Munich Guild. A photographic department is also formed to collect large photographs and make lantern slides, for instance, of good examples of buildings such as factories, well planned towns, theatres, fine engineering, and other work which cannot be represented in the loan-collections by actual things. Lectures and leaflets are also provided to supplement and describe the loan-collections. It should be especially remembered that the collections are selected to illustrate good work of the present in relation to every-day life. They do not consist of museum pieces, because it is the aim of the Werkbund to demonstrate that excellence in the production of the every-day article must be the base of any artistic development in the nation.

The collections are lent for the cost of packing and carriage only, and consist of: printing (such as, the modern book, advertisements, commercial printing, letter head-

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ings, etc., labels and boxes, development of types), art and the school (including modern lithography), pottery, metal work, glass painting, textiles, wicker work, leather, ivory work, etc.

When these collections are on loan in a town the local museum endeavors to supplement them with specimens from its own collections illustrating the old as linking up with the new, not with the "museum specimens," but with the every-day article of the past. Some of us rather feel that the term "museum specimen" needs suppressing. We have had too much of it; it is too far removed from every-day life to be of use or inspiration to the ordinary craftsman, and noticing the present poor design, notably in the pottery trade (in which cheap and bogus imitation of the antique seems the only merit), one may infer that the elaborate museum specimen is partly responsible.

The Design and Industries Association grew out of a memorial which was presented last January to Sir Llewellyn Smith, the permanent Secretary to the Board of Trade, wherein it was pointed out that:

The remarkable expansion of German trade, achieved largely at the expense of our own, has resulted, not simply from the energetic exploitation of fresh markets, but also in a striking degree from the untiring efforts which the Germans have made to improve the quality of their work. During recent years the intelligent cooperation of artists, educationalists, and manufacturers (assisted by such organizations as the Deutsche Werkbund), with the object of freeing their products from the stigma of "cheap and nasty," has resulted in a marked improvement in the higher grades of German manufactures.

Side by side with this there has been a widespread propaganda among the buying public, whereby the demand for higher standards in workmanship and design has been encouraged to keep pace with the supply. Stress was laid on the fact that the same educational cooperation which has been applied by the Germans with such successful results to their scientific manufactures, *e. g.*, aniline dyes, has lately been applied to their art industries also.

In England, on the other hand, notwithstanding the efforts and achievements of

the Board of Education, supported by the art masters of the country, commerce and education remain two separate unyielding and opposing activities. This condition makes for sterility of education and the degrading of commerce. It is desirable above all things to bring the two into true relationship, so that education may become a preparation for commerce, and commerce the fulfilment of education.

Other nations are building up their commerce on a sound basis of intelligent education, and it is only by emulating such methods that we can, in the long run, hope to compete successfully with them.

The memorial did not ignore the fact that there are in England individual artists and craftsmen whose work is superior to the best that foreign craftsmen can show. Under our present incohesive conditions, however, they have very little influence upon the trade designer or workman, and as a result, the standard, even of mediocrity, amongst the rank and file is a deplorably low one. It is here that efficient training and intelligent demand would do so much to raise the general level. As a result of this memorial an exhibition of German and Austrian objects, illustrating the successful use of design in industry, was held at the Goldsmiths' Hall in March, and the idea of founding a Design and Industries Association was warmly supported, not only by visitors to the exhibition but by many articles in the press. The exhibition illustrated the influence which the English Arts and Crafts and the Morris movement in particular had had upon German work, especially in printing. This influence, entirely neglected at home, has resulted in Germany capturing much of certain sides of English trade. The narrow attitude of our arts and crafts worker is also responsible for their neglect. From this exhibition sprang the Design and Industries Association, whose aims are:

The improvement of British industry through the cooperation of the manufacturer, the designer and the distributor. By encouraging a more vital interest in design in its widest sense it seeks to augment that technical excellence which is a characteristic of British products, believing that thereby the demand for these in the world market will be largely increased.

Sound design is not only an essential to technical excellence of the highest order, but furthermore it tends towards economy of production; the first necessity of sound design is fitness for purpose.

Modern industrial methods, and the great possibilities inherent in the machine, demand the best artistic no less than the best mechanical and scientific abilities.

In order to attract the best brains it is necessary to associate the name of the designer with the article produced, and this should be recognized as a commercial asset to both manufacturer and distributor. And its methods partly are:

By holding exhibitions of the best current examples of commercial products demonstrating the foregoing point of view.

By publishing literature illustrating the objects of the association, and by propaganda of a similar nature in the press.

By forming trade groups of manufacturers, designers, and distributors to further the aims of the association by means of their special knowledge.

By enlisting the sympathies and support of schools of art and technical institutes throughout the country, and assisting them to a closer relationship with the actualities of commercial design.

The association is, of course, only in its infancy, and future plans are being discussed. Some of us attended the Werkbund meetings last year, and having followed its work for some time, we feel that the plan of having a museum for art in trade might be adopted with advantage in this country. It is hoped to develop the idea further, and for this the cooperation of the museum, the art and craft school, the manufacturer, and others is needed to stimulate a national spirit for efficiency and quality work. Especially is this the case in those trades in which the arts have their share, and which therefore come nearer to the sphere of work of industrial art museums.

There is, however, another side of museum work connected with trade of which I should like to speak, and this can well be illustrated by the museum in Vienna arranged for the wicker trades. As a part of the trade school there this museum has collected all the raw materials used for weaving in cane, grass, wicker, and work of like kinds, which are found in every part

of the world, together with specimens old and new, illustrating their use. The specimens range from beautiful old coiled basket work from Mexico, to fine modern specimens of the latest form of split-cane work or fine French willow work. The old and the new are ranged side by side. Recent or modern things being often inexpensive, little collections illustrating fresh ideas can be changed from time to time. Alongside these the raw materials used in basket work are shown in all their different varieties, including specimens illustrating growths and diseases to which willow is liable with particulars and illustrations of insect-pests that are a bane to willow growers. The whole of this museum is so well planned that it must suggest ideas and inspire any manufacturer or craftsman who makes use of it. There is, unfortunately, no question that Germans and Austrians are first in this trade throughout the world, both as regards originality and general standard of good workmanship, and such museums no doubt contribute to this success. The excellent plan of this museum could surely be applied to other trades, always linking up the past to the present and the living problem. Archaeology will only rarely appeal to the manufacturer. Museum specimens are apt to be confined to old examples. Rather they might show a sequence of development connecting that work with the present day, and so enable the modern workman to see how one style develops from another and leads to that on which he is actually at work.

I know the museums wish to help in problems of today, but they must be alive to every-day needs. It was suggested to me the other day that one fine modern enamelled tin advertisement plate in a museum might be of more value for modern needs than many rubbings of old brasses. It is clearly probable that the interest of the average man would be aroused and his attention called to a fine thing, the use of which he knows. Again, take printing, the museum usually finishes with those magnificent early specimens and standards of fine printing belonging to the fifteenth century. But fine work is being done today, and comparison of some average or bad modern work with the fine things both old and new would surely lead

people to a better appreciation of the fine work of their own time. Fine carving is collected from the ends of the earth, but no one has tried to improve the humble bread-board which we use on our tables day by day. Put one of these side by side with old carvings in the museum.

At the present moment there is bound to be a large number of memorials and memorial tablets erected. Cannot the museum help to put the public in the right way to produce things that will be not only dignified expressions of grief, but beautiful objects to be sent on to posterity? A little exhibition could be arranged of local stones showing how they can be suitably used instead of the foreign marble which is always out of place in this climate; also of models, casts, or illustrations of simple tablets, old and new, calling attention to the best examples of old work in the churches of the neighborhood.

Comparison is very valuable for driving home a lesson. We might, for example, compare pieces of eighteenth century metal work for furniture with the nineteenth century copies and those of the present day. Do not be afraid to point out what is right and what is wrong. Many methods might be adopted for collecting groups of work for such industrial art museums. Each town might make its special trade the object of a collection, or museums might collaborate and exchange collections, or by the aid of some central committee repre-

sentative loan-collections might be made which would be available for all, and would illustrate the minor arts as they should be today.

The Design and Industries Association hopes shortly to make collections of printing and other articles, both English and foreign. These it will be glad to lend, in order to cooperate with museum curators, and to receive your support in making such collections really educational to the modern manufacturer, the workman and the public.

You will enlist a wider interest in your work, as many people will be glad to help if they see you take a lively interest in the problems which immediately concern them. If you arrange such collections as have been suggested, show simple every-day objects, finely and beautifully made, with which we can make our houses and lives pleasant.

This may be work only representing a small sphere of your museum activities, but we are all anxious to get back good work and good design into our every-day life and through our industries. It is, moreover, a vital necessity if we are to hold our own in the world's markets, and a nation that lives on reproducing the old, however good it may be, does not stand for progress, and must be decadent. The museum directors met with at the Werkbund meetings were all keenly alive to their use in this campaign for quality work, and it can hardly be that their English confrères will wish to be behindhand.

CHARDIN

BY DUNCAN PHILLIPS

IT is the paradox of Chardin which puzzles us in attempting to estimate the importance of his achievement. All those who understand the qualities of supremely good painting invariably become noticeably exhilarated over the mere surface of a little masterpiece by this most subtle of "Little Masters." Of course, as also with Vermeer—it really isn't little work at all. It is big, bold painting by a knowing brush which left enduring beauties where it passed. And there is big human feeling in it, too, expended (more's the pity if you will) upon a kitchen kettle or the corner of a sideboard.

And the color! Fresher, finer color the world has never known. In the Louvre—Salle La Caze—the Chardins fascinate. From the sensual, sentimental, fashionable attractions of Greuze, Boucher, Nattier and the rest, one must return again and again to the mellow warmth of Chardin's peaches and the lustrous coldness of his grapes to the depths of ruby wine in his old dusty bottle, and to the tender blue of his house-keeper's apron, to the rich brown of his kitchen tiles and the fiery gleam of his copper cauldron, more than anything else to the wonderful way the colors play to-